

Roof of Paradise

By Mildred Cram

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TIRZA was romantic. She loved her conception of life, but had not so much as a nodding acquaintance with the real thing. And when she fell in love with Willard Graves she fell in love with an ideal, not with a fallible human being. She was the potter, he the clay.

Tirza was pretty—not too pretty—tall and slim, with lots of brown hair, and eyes that are called "Irish."

Nothing had ever stirred her except beauty. She had had her dreams, but they were the dreams of a romantic child. She wanted perfection. She was somewhat of a prude. She had decided that certain things were ugly and, to avoid seeing them, she closed the eyes of her mind. Old people liked her because, like them, she had so few desires. Young people were a little afraid of her, took their troubles to her, and left her out of their games.

Tirza had been very well brought up by particular parents. She had "wintered" in Rome and "summered" in any number of Swiss and French resorts, always protected, abetted in her instinctive postponement of reality.

Left an orphan at twenty-five, she came back to America to win her way out of a respectable poverty. Europe, and all that expensive, dangerous love of beauty had been paid for out of her father's capital.

She landed, poor falling rocket, in the office of a fashion magazine, where she

wrote captions and polite little travel articles that flowered shyly among the advertisements.

She lived uptown—One Hundred and Fifty-sixth Street. Tirza's setting: A gilded-cage apartment house; two rubber plants and a genuine Persian rug in the lobby; an intricate parking of baby carriages before the entrance. For atmosphere, the roar of roller skates.

It is no exaggeration to say that Tirza was mentally nauseated. From her windows she saw nothing but the pink-and-yellow brick façade of a motion picture theater where electric lights flashed expensively night and day.

Tirza shrank from the elemental and beribboned perambulator brigade in One Hundred and Fifty-sixth Street. Any one could have a baby apparently, but only the chosen few could build beautiful, immortal things—— The idea tapered off.

What she really wanted was the realization of an ideal. It is simple enough to cherish idealism in a setting of marble and cypress, but in the Broadway subway a confirmed dreamer either surrenders or becomes a drizzling optimist. Tirza suffered, where you and I, seasoned to the inevitable, would have entered a private imaginative vacuum until released at Times Square to a glimpse of the sky.

She met Willard Graves at a birthday party given by the office staff in honor of the editor, who had reached forty-five

and still believed, professionally, in his illusions.

The staff frightened and puzzled Tirza. These young people were all so pleasantly and carelessly sophisticated. She couldn't understand them. For one thing, they liked New York; they called its ugliness picturesque, its vulgarity stimulating, its incongruity beautiful. Tirza was out of place that afternoon. She sat by the window, isolated, looking out at the harsh, clear-cut skyscrapers picketing the horizon.

And now, at last, you have Willard Graves.

He was the invited guest of the art editor, a mere newspaperman at this gathering of witty young sophists.

Perhaps because he, too, felt out of it, he spoke to Tirza and offered her a cup of weak tea, brewed in the decorative office samovar.

Willard Graves asked her to tell him all about herself. This was common politeness, the ordinary bait flung out to pretty nibblers. But Tirza had had no experience with anglers. She told him, with appropriate melancholy, all about herself. The recital would have chilled most men, but Willard Graves wasn't listening—he was watching the curve of her lips and the lights in her hair and her lovely, healthy slenderness.

He was thinking that he ought to marry and settle down; he was thirty and it was time that he got somewhere. For ten years he had played with a sophomore lightness of heart. He must, he decided, make a man of himself, get out of boarding houses, work, climb the ladder of achievement—

His idea, also, tapered off. No pert, bobbed sophist could have taken him so far. Tirza was that rare anachronism, a potential wife.

Willard Graves wooed Tirza with patience. He was not imaginative, but he tried to make her see New York as he saw it—a great torso slapped into suggestive outline by the hand of a new

race. Tirza saw only the crude mixture of architectures. The American landscape struck her as being Nature left too much alone; she preferred the ancient lawns of Oxford and the clipped hedges of Versailles—Nature smoothed, subdued. But she tried to share Willard's enthusiasm, tramping across Queensboro Bridge at sunset, or breasting the cold winds pouring through the funnel of lower Broadway to stare up the stone cliffs at the stars. It was superb ugliness, she told him, but it was ugly! She dreamed of the terrace at Revello, a cloud above the sea, and yellow roses thick as cloth of gold.

One night he asked her to marry him.

Tirza didn't answer at once. She glanced down at their two hands clasped together, then up at his face, asking herself with desperate urgency whether she loved him. His eyes never ceased to stare at her, and a shiver of fear and hostility ran through her body like a flame.

"Please don't!" she said.

"Don't what?"

"Look at me like that."

"But I can't help it. I love you. I'll do any earthly thing for you. I'll dig down into the earth or build up into the sky. Say the word!"

"You ought to write," she insisted.

"I'm no good at it."

"You will be."

He shook his head.

"I'm not sure. I have an itch to build something visible."

"Material?"

He sensed the light irony of that word.

"Well, perhaps. A book. What does it amount to? Paper! Printed words! If they're not *great* words—"

His hand tightened over hers.

"But I'll stick at it, if you'll marry me, Tirza."

His eyes were so close, so strange. She didn't know him, understand him. Yet, if she desired, she could belong to him.

"I'll marry you," she said suddenly, turning her face away.

They were sitting on a bench in Central Park—this was a limelighted wooing—and now she stood up, wanting to move, to avoid for a moment the triumph in his eyes. And they walked down from the crest of a small hill toward the city. It lay beyond the feathery barrier of trees, a pool of lemon-yellow light, a vague and immense sound, an antagonist.

"We'll be poor for a while," Willard Graves said. "I haven't a cent."

"I know."

She felt the completeness of his dedication and there was a touch of cruelty in her enjoyment of her power. But in the shadow of a long passageway, a place dim and echoing, empty of passers-by, he caught her close, tipped her head back, and kissed her.

Tirza's first thought was that she must look ridiculous. She pushed him away.

"Not here! Some one might see."

"Beggars can't be choosers," he said. "I'd prefer moonlight and nightingales. But a kiss is a kiss."

"Not in Central Park."

They went on, unsteady, self-conscious, estranged. Tirza knew that she had failed, and tried desperately to justify herself.

"It's so common, kissing in public."

He swung around.

"I wonder," he said, "if you're romantic or if you are simply a prude?"

They had not left the shadow of the passageway. She held her hand out to him, unrepentant, wanting only to experiment with that wonderful new power. And this time, surrendering, she lost herself for a moment. She loved him. She must love him to feel this way. Yet, she wasn't sure. She heard herself saying: "I love you. I do love you. *I do!*"

They were married in April. Tirza wanted to go to Revello for the honey-

moon; Willard was more practical. Between them they had a thousand dollars. They could squander it all on a Mediterranean sunrise or they could furnish a little flat somewhere above One Hundredth Street.

Willard was weary of boarding houses. An Axminster rug on his own hearth, a morris chair, a bookshelf and an honest-to-goodness kitchen struck him as things supremely, delectably romantic. He hankered to help with the dishes, wrapped about by one of Tirza's gingham aprons. He wanted a resting place for his college trophies, his precious books and photograph albums, his stamp collection. He didn't expect that Tirza would understand his passion for stamps, but he did want her to respect it. After all, he respected her love of seven-branch candelabra, terra-cotta boxes and sepia prints.

Tirza wanted Revello. She longed to walk with him, hand in hand, through the high-flung gardens above the sea; to feel the passion and beauty of life there where it is most passionate and beautiful—

"That sounds great," Willard said. "You make me dizzy. Honest you do! I'd like to go. But how about furniture, and stuff for the kitchen, and rent? We'd come back from Italy stone broke. To what? To a boarding house?"

They compromised on two weeks in Virginia. The old farmhouse where they stayed was quaint enough to satisfy Tirza, and Willard put up with the inconveniences because to Tirza they were picturesque.

Together, they walked through the forests of dwarf pine, and when Willard had exhausted Yale and "the good old days," he would lie stretched at full length, his head in Tirza's lap, listening to her. There were moments when he felt certain that he was boring her. But never for an instant would he admit that she bored him. He hung on her words, watching her mouth, her quiet, innocent

eyes, as if fascinated by her very aloofness from him, from reality.

Perhaps he was too sure of her, too triumphant. She would have preferred him to remain in the attitude of a supplicant, pleading with her for her gifts. He accepted her love, not carelessly, but boyishly, with a frank, simple pleasure in her and in himself. Tirza was vaguely troubled that anything so radical as marriage could be entered into so lightly—as, for instance, one walks down a sunny road. She wondered whether he valued her dedication, understood what an effort it had cost her to come out of her shadowy girlhood into the dazzling sunlight of maturity.

Yet there were moments when she loved him beyond question. Then, he was grateful, exuberant.

What a wonderful life they were going to have! He would go back to the newspaper, write special articles, Sunday-supplement stuff, perhaps, in time, signed editorials. From these he would graduate to the short story—Tirza could help him there, out of her knowledge of places and people. He was sorry that he hadn't traveled. Some of the men in his class had gone to the Low Archipelago, others to South America. One chap he knew had settled in Africa. Somehow he, himself, had missed all that. He wasn't, he imagined, an adventurer.

"Adventurers don't marry," Tirza said.

"We'll adventure together."

"Some day——"

"Tirza, I'd like to buy a schooner and knock about as Jack London and Charman did."

Tirza knew that such mating is rare. Willard was no vagabond. He would be content with the things she hated. He hadn't the flame. She looked down at his face. His eyes were closed and he sucked at his little brier pipe. A boy. A very ordinary, lovable boy. With

tentative fingers she caressed his hair, suddenly afraid of the doubt in her heart. "I do love him," she said to herself. And aloud she murmured:

"I love you. I do. You know I do!"

"Of course," he said, not opening his eyes. "Of course, darling. I know it. I'm sure of it."

Willard worked very hard at the business of being literary.

The servant's two-by-four bedroom was set aside as his "study." Here, squeezed behind a workmanlike desk with his precious encyclopedia at hand, a bowl of very black ink and stacks of yellow paper, he spent his days and a great part of his nights for three years. While he worked, Tirza tiptoed from room to room, holding her breath as if actually in the presence of that terrifying phantom "inspiration." She waited, growing paler, thinner, fainter, watching Willard Graves with a sort of accusation in her eyes.

She was waiting, Willard knew, for his masterpiece.

In the meantime, he emerged from newspaper work into some of the magazines. It was a very narrow squeak financially and nothing much of a debut. If only Tirza weren't waiting! If only he believed in himself! If only he understood how those fellows—Kipling, Conrad, Galsworthy—turned the trick! What was the proportion? What the strangeness? Their secret eluded him. He tried to make music and made only a dull sound, the tom-tom of mediocrity. He hated the dark study. More than anything he hated himself because he had won Tirza on a pretense, had given her, not his true self, but a false image of himself.

"Materialist" was Tirza's word of contempt. She wanted him in some way to be distinguished. She wanted him to write for the "better" magazines, with that mincing and mannered restraint

which is called *précieux*. Without saying so, she made him feel that he was commonplace.

"But what is good and what is bad?" he demanded. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Aren't you?"

He shook his head. It was quite true; he wasn't sure.

He saw very little of other men, being too cloistered to meet men casually and too poor to afford clubs. In desperation he haunted the offices of his literary agent, eager for talk of the world. But more often, attracted by symbols of visible achievement, he hung about buildings in process of construction, watching the delicate upward crawling of spidery steel framework. Here was something to get your teeth into—a man's job!

He said nothing to Tirza about these expeditions. Every morning she put out fresh paper, sharpened the pencils, filled the inkwell, dusted the thesaurus and tiptoed out again, leaving Willard to bleak labor, to servitude in an intellectual treadmill.

One day he said to her:

"My stuff's rotten, and you know it!"

She did know it, but she flew to kiss him, to reassure him that she believed in him.

"I'm not an artist," he insisted. "I'd like to be, for your sake. I think I must be an artisan. A builder. I've always liked to do things with my hands—I'd rather wield an awl than a pen. I like being with men, talking to them, getting their point of view. It isn't that I don't love you—but we're together too much. I have a feeling, and it may be only a feeling, that you're *waiting* for me to do something I'll never do; waiting, watching, perhaps praying. I'm in there, in that room, alone with an empty mind, alone with the *fact* that I've failed. You're out here waiting. It drives me crazy. Some day I'll stretch up my arms like Samson and push the walls out and bury both of us in the ruins."

"What do you want to do?" she asked, turning her eyes away.

He pulled her down on his knee and smoothed the hair back from her forehead, caressing her because at that moment he hated her.

"Well," he began after a moment, "there's Dad's business——"

"Roofing!" she said, and bit her lips.

"Why not? There's money in it. Dad wants me; has always wanted me. In Heaven's name, Tirza, why do you prefer five thousand printed words to a damned good roofing job?"

"You needn't swear!"

"Don't be feminine."

She pushed his hand away.

"Talk to me like a man, Tirza—like a friend. Forget we're married. Try to see *me*—what I am—what I need!"

"You promised me."

Willard Graves stared hard at her.

He thought how sullen she was, with her brows drawn together and the corners of her mouth turned down.

"I made a mistake," he said at last. "I thought I wanted to write. Have you ever noticed those saleswomen who 'walk' walking dolls up and down shop windows? How many children do you suppose envy them that deadly job? Well, I have held my own particular walking doll by its bisque hand, and for interminable hours I have walked it up and down. I'm sick of it. I'm going to quit."

"Very well," Tirza said.

He destroyed his manuscripts with a vicious pleasure in scattering the pieces, not to the four winds, but to the wastebasket. Then he went to his father and confessed himself a failure, disclosing a passion for roofing and a good old American desire to start at the bottom and work up—presumably to the roof. His father chewed his cigar in the good old American fashion, grunted, ruminated, rang an electric bell and set Willard to work.

Thereafter, his days were full of plans and specifications, contracts, factory details—roofs upon which he trod with the light heart of a prisoner set free.

Tirza was left at home to wonder about love, life and her unsatisfied heart. She no longer tiptoed. She no longer waited. She didn't understand roofing, and didn't want to. It seemed more and more impossible to find anything to share with him. She knew that she had no influence whatever; Willard's point of view, now that she had dropped the reins, had galloped off to fields unfamiliar to her, there to crop delightedly. He was forever pastured in "business."

"What shall I do?" she demanded of the discontented woman reflected in the mirror. "I've got to *live*. Marriage isn't the end; it isn't even a beginning. I'm young. I'm pretty. This flat, Willard. *Roofs!*"

It was characteristic of Tirza, who wanted contact only with things she liked, to underestimate this new grazing ground. Willard Graves had gone where she could not follow him, so, naturally, she did not want to follow him.

She joined a political club and for a year or two interested herself in feminism. Willard was a passive feminist. It amused and vaguely embarrassed him when Tirza made speeches from the tonneau of an automobile. Once, for her sake, he marched in a suffrage parade, ashamed, self-conscious, advertising his state of mind by his grin.

But there was none of the spectacular martyrdom of England's suffrage campaign to carry Tirza far. This interest faded and she came to another closed door. What next?

Very naturally, beauty came next, since the roofing business prospered. They moved downtown and Tirza let her imagination run riot hand in hand with expensive decorators. The black-and-gold drawing-room was a long cry

from Willard's Axminster and the old morris chair before the gas log.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

Willard wrinkled up his eyes.

"Very nice."

"You're very inarticulate."

"What do you *want* me to say? I don't understand all this color and flub-dub; but if it's what you want, dear—I'm game."

"Game!"

Then Tirza met Hal Jowett. It was perhaps inevitable that the triangle should have been pointed by a painter. Hal Jowett was what Tirza called "distinguished." His sleek and amiable personality was known in the casual, bohemian circles frequented by illustrators and fashionable portrait painters, the serious, rather somber haunts of the "big men" and the mannered studios of Greenwich Village. He was somewhat of a "big man" himself. Yet he fell between the timid conservative and the dashing modernist and seemed destined to follow rather than to lead. His work was successful because he was always a lap or two behind the revolutionists. To be exact, he belonged to the romantic school of impressionism. He had a facile technique and a sure-fire formula. The initiate, entering a gallery, could pick a Jowett at fifty feet. And the public, finding it simple enough to imitate the critics, was subtly flattered—and purchased Jowetts.

"Ah! There's a Jowett! Have one at home. Patches of snow; birch trees—charming!"

Not being troubled with discontent, Jowett found time for Tirza. He looked at her, on the occasion of their meeting, as if he found her beautiful, and so, of course, she became beautiful, her beauty leaping out to meet his appreciation. Suddenly, life was worth living, after a stale interlude in which it had seemed that her youth was gone, her spirit quiescent. To Willard, she had been simply

Tirza; he had fallen out of the habit of making love to her. It was somehow more satisfactory to make love to the roofing business. Willard supposed that sooner or later all women, all wives, retreated into this chaste aloofness; after his first disappointment he had made his adjustment, blaming himself for lack of comprehension.

Jowett had no such misgivings. He was not afraid of Tirza because he guessed how eager she was for what he had to offer. But he was far too skillful to tell her that she was starved or to hint at thirst. He found her plastic, but not fragile.

"I met an interesting man to-day," Tirza remarked at dinner. "An artist. I think we'll be friends."

"That's fine!" Willard said.

"You won't be jealous?"

Willard flushed.

"Naturally not!"

"Thanks. I expect to see a good deal of him. His name's Hal Jowett."

"Um. Don't know him."

"No. You wouldn't," Tirza said, and to her own amazement she tempered this barb with a smile.

Jowett was patient. There was just enough of the feminine in the leavening to endear him to women like Tirza. He was the sort of man who makes the dressing of a salad a religious ceremony. He had an expert's appreciation of women's clothes, who made them, why they were good or bad style, and whether they were or were not becoming.

Whenever Tirza bought a new hat, Willard Graves would say: "A new dip? Pippin!"

But Jowett would say: "A Lucette? Very amusing. But you wear it too far forward—a little to one side—delightful!"

The cut of Hal Jowett's coat and boots was deeply satisfying. Willard Graves would have thought himself turning decadent had he taken an in-

terest in his appearance—to be clean-shaven, brushed, decently clothed in blue serge was enough. Tirza might have fallen in love with him had he worn tweed overcoats, mufflers and tan spats. His two-year-old derby hurt her like a personal affront.

"All your ties are dark blue with white spots!" she said to him one day.

Willard glanced at himself in the mirror and wriggled his chin.

"What's the matter with dark blue and spots? Neat, not gaudy."

"But don't you see——" Tirza began.

"I see. Perfectly. Too well!"

Hal Jowett saw, too, in his way. He waited an artistic interval. He wanted Tirza with a very particular longing, since he knew that he was the source, she the thirsty one.

Jowett did not expect opposition. So that when he found Tirza waiting for him in her little black-and-gold drawing-room, all her nerves on the surface, her eyes eager, her hands unsteady when he grasped them, he kissed her fingers and said:

"I can't help myself. I love you."

"You've spoiled it," Tirza whispered.

"We were friends—now there's *this*!"

But Jowett was stubborn.

"I love you. I have, always. Oh, I know that's old—lovers have said the same thing from the beginning of time and love. But what's new about the way I feel? You're the one woman. Don't tell me you love that husband of yours!"

"I don't know."

"You'd better find out. I'll say now what I've wanted to say all along. You're being cheated. A woman like you—here!"

"He's good to me."

"Of course. Don't think I'm painting him black. I think you're cheating him."

"I?"

"You!"

"But I tried!"

"Well?"

She covered her face with her hands.

"I tried. I don't understand him. I don't like his friends. My friends don't like him. Business is *important* to him. It isn't to me. I hate it. I hate details, I hate the commonplace."

"There's only one life," Jowett said gravely. "Isn't it amazing how carelessly we waste it? As if there were more and more—an endless supply of lives, of intact personalities, of identical chances. And before we know it——"

She interrupted him.

"I always wanted to give him beauty. And you say I've cheated him. It isn't so!" She pushed Jowett away, both hands against his breast. "I don't know! I've got to *think*. Give me time!"

Tirza was afraid now that she had found what she had so long been seeking. To justify herself, she fell into the habit of underrating Willard Graves. She lacked the courage to tell him that Jowett could offer rarer spirit fare. Somehow the truth would hurt, put that way. Instead, she sought to topple over the matrimonial edifice by removing, one by one, the supporting walls. Breathless, fearful, tormented, inwardly shaken, she became outwardly indifferent, a creature shut away from, shrinking before, Willard Graves' dumb and matter-of-fact affection. He *must* see! He must open the door and admit her happiness!

Willard Graves was not a fool. He watched her, bewildered only by her methods. The facts he understood. She was unhappy. She seemed so small, so unimportant, just a woman, muddled, self-centered. She would turn her head away to avoid the touch of his hand on her forehead—— Perhaps, if he could talk to her, he could make her understand that her happiness was in his keeping. She had never grasped, dealt with reality. Poor little girl. Poor little Tirza, chasing rainbows.

Once, finding him with the "Dialogues of Plato," she said:

"I didn't know you cared for such things."

He gave her a curious look, and put the book down.

"You don't know much about me, Tirza. We're growing apart. Something's wrong. We don't talk any more."

Tirza let the moment pass. She shrugged her shoulders.

Willard came over to her and put his hand on her hair.

"Let's get away," he said. "Away from people and business and all these little happenings that clutter up life. Let's go abroad—it will do you good—Italy. What do you say? That place you used to talk about—what was it?"

"Revello," she whispered, with a strange feeling in her heart. Suddenly she caught his arm, and put her face against it.

"Then it's a go!" Willard said. She felt his awkward hand on her hair. "I'll get the tickets. You pack. I've been a fool. I didn't know you still remembered that place."

"I've been remembering for six years," she reminded him.

She wrote Hal Jowett that she was sailing. Jowett's answer was good-humored and characteristic:

I understand why you're going—— Well, he won't meet the test. There's no roof on paradise! I am going to Capri within ten days, there to wait your change of heart.

They sailed in April. Willard had never crossed the ocean before. He was excited and exuberant. He paced the decks, throwing back his shoulders and taking deep breaths of the salty wind. He played quoits and shuffleboard with the ship's doctor, spun yarns in the smoking saloon, visited the steerage, the engine room, the bridge. Tirza, tucked into her steamer chair, watched the sea, where a shivering and splintering of sunlight dazzled her eyes. All the critical devils in her mind were sitting in judg-

ment on Willard Graves, appraising him, finding him provincial, awkward, a bore. She thought of Hal Jowett with a leap in her heart.

All down the Mediterranean Willard talked roofs to an Italian contractor. She heard his voice booming prices and estimates. There was a full moon. Tirza saw Chopin's Majorca—a sable island in a silver sea—Minorca, Corsica. The air was warm and sweet, full of the promise of fresh grass, fruit blossoms, mimosa and furze. Willard Graves turned his back on this beauty; flicked his cigarette; laughed. This and that cost so much and so much.

Then Naples. Willard called the cabby "Tony."

"Jove, I've never seen so many wops!"

The Toldeo was a "dirty joint." But he enjoyed Vesuvius and its single plume of purple smoke. After dinner he bought post cards and spent an hour penning messages to his office staff at home:

We're in Wopland. Having a great time.
Yours, à la spaghetti. W. G.

In the morning he was triumphant:

"Found a New York *Times*. Only two weeks old. What do you know about that?"

In the afternoon they drove to Pompeii. Then to Salerno. Then, over the dizzy Amalfi road, to the Cappuccini, where they spent the night. Willard would have preferred a motor to the Sardinian ponies with their pheasant-feather headdress and their merry ringing of little bells. He took photographs at every turn, scattered pennies for ragged urchins to fight over, spoke "guinea English" to the driver.

"I'm ashamed of him," Tirza thought. "I'm ashamed!"

On the terrace after dinner she slipped her arm through his and leaned against him.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" she asked.

Her query seemed to mute his loud

exuberance. He held his breath as if he heard for the first time the insistent demand of her spirit.

"Why, yes," he said at last. "Very beautiful."

"Thank Heaven!" she thought. "He didn't say 'nice.'"

He went indoors to send off more post cards, and she stayed on the terrace, walking up and down between the ghostly pillars. Far below she heard the surr on the beach and the light jingle of bells and a man's voice singing as he drove his cart down from the vineyards. She pictured herself running away to that other—the romantic lover. With a little shiver she heaped audacity upon audacity. There was only one life, and she was wasting it. The wind on her face was like the touch of gentle fingers; it ruffled her hair and lifted her scarf, fluttering it out behind her.

The drive to Revello was a bitter pilgrimage. As if seized with a deliberate perversity, Willard talked of nothing but the heat, the dust, the scorching sun.

There were roses at Revello. And the sun went down in a bank of crimson clouds.

Willard complained of the dinner:

"I'm sick and tired of veal and salad! I'd give my right hand for a sirloin steak and baked potatoes. And corn on the cob!"

But he found a congenial soul in the little salon—a lawyer from Wichita—and they took their cigars and coffee indoors. Tirza went out alone into the blue twilight, walking swiftly, afraid of her thoughts. Off there in the sea was Capri, and Jowett waiting for her! What had he said? "There is no roof on paradise!"

All she had to do was to drive to Amalfi before Willard woke in the morning. She could find boatmen there to take her to Capri, to Jowett, to her dream.

She thought: "I have a right to my dream. I'll go."

She fancied that she could see Capri through the gathering darkness, and Jowett smiling to himself at this sentimental journey of hers. And with a shiver of delight and a sort of shame she realized how sure he must have been—to have crossed the ocean to that rendezvous! Sure of her. Perhaps too sure! She paused, lifting her head, tasting the sweetness of the night. Unless there should be a miracle, she would go down to Amalfi at dawn.

Then, behind her, she heard Willard's voice:

"Getting late, Tirza! We'd better turn in."

"Very well," she said quietly, "I'm coming."

She did not sleep at all. Beyond the open window the stiff leaves of a camellia bush rattled and whispered; a cock crowed somewhere; once a sound of light laughter and singing passed through the darkness, growing fainter and fainter down the hill. Willard slept, unstirring, breathing quietly. Tirza could see his dark head on the pillow—if only he had sensed her intention! But he slept like a man secure in his possessions, a man without enemies.

It seemed to her that she stood at the very last gate of all.

She tiptoed into her room and dressed by the light of a candle, startled by unexpected glimpses of her white face in the mirror. She was finding romance in the essence a bitter brew.

She packed her suit case, putting in the folding leather frame containing Willard's photograph. This seemed the least she could do, and gave her a faint glow of comfort. She wondered whether Jowett would be quite so easy an old shoe. Living up to Jowett would mean being always at her best. He was particular about a woman's hair, her hands, the perfume she used. Tirza hurriedly

packed her bottle of *eau de Cologne*—she should have *ambre* or *lilas* or *jasmin*. "I can't do it," she thought. "Not even with *ambre* or *lilas*. I'm *eau de Cologne*."

She went to the threshold of Willard's room and stared through the darkness. How could she tell him that he bored her? She remembered all the little things he had done to please her. She remembered how intolerant she had been of his tolerance. And suddenly she wondered whether he, too, had not been bored, abysmally bored, with *eau de Cologne*.

A cool wind came in through the open window. Outside there was a deepening of the shadows. She felt her heart contract, and her eyes filled with tears. For the first time in her life she knew the cleansing fire of self-distrust. She wanted Willard to open his eyes, to speak to her, to save her from herself. She wanted to be certain that he would accept her, as he had always accepted her, for what she was. She unpacked the bag and undressed again, quickly, quietly.

Her romantic dawn found her standing in the doorway. The sun came up, thrusting long spearheads of golden light through the mists of the morning.

Willard Graves opened his eyes and saw Tirza watching him with a strange new humility in her eyes. He blinked, turned his head on the pillow, and stared.

"What the deuce——"

Tirza began to tremble. She got down on her knees by his bed and got hold of his hand and kissed it.

"Why, hello," he said, "this is our dawn! Why, Tirza. Why, little kid, I forgot."

"I love you," she whispered. "I do. I do!"

"I know," Willard said. And, leaning sidewise, he kissed the top of her head.